SMOKE

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PROVIDENCE *RHODE ISLAND*

Past Patrons

Lindsay Todd Damon

Lewis Chase

AT THE EDGE

At the edge of the ocean, where it curves to land in a mile-long arc,
a boy is sitting, legs curled beneath him,
  naked to earth and sea,
  naked to wind and sun.
The summer waves, irregularly regular,
dash their soft bursts of coolness to his waist,
then in retreat suck the sand from beneath him.

It is noon: his hair has dried in the heat,
  his shoulders are tanning.
Stillness: the sound of water itself is a stillness.

I am a statue: I cannot move.
The breeze cannot ruffle my hair.
My legs are marble; they have never stirred.
Rockweed has grown to them.

I tower immense, gigantic.
My head is above the horizon.
Inch-people watch their sunsets
behind my mountainous knees.
Their boats swarm like minnows about my thighs.

Should I move, it would be
  the annihilation of a race,
  the catastrophe of a universe.
I have done it centuries ago;
I shall do it again.

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SMOKE

The ocean that touches him reaches unbroken to Europe,
clasps each continent, passes entirely around the world,
and returns to touch him again.

I am a grain of sand, and cannot move of myself.
I am the tiniest thing there is on the surface of the earth.
The sun shines upon me, the waves tumble me over,
the huge jaws of minnows suck me in and spit me out.
Enormous feet of children press me deep among my innumerable fellows.
Yet the sky knows me;
every wind finds me;
the great tides pour themselves out for me particularly.

Stillness: it is noon.
Unmoving he sits, propped by his firm right arm,
his legs curled beneath him on the firm sand.
His knees are wet and cool, his shoulders dried and warm.
He is a pyramid between the curved planes of air and water.
The four great elements impinge upon him.
Immobile at their core, the boy sits
perfectly quiet, living a happiness so intense
that the horizon perceptibly trembles before his eyes
with a motion that is neither the tossing of waves nor the shaking of heat.

S. Foster Damon

TRAIN AT NIGHT

Out of the warming gray glow of ashes sliding
Down a tunnel of tin slipping against
Rivers of air clutching gravity I
Lie straight a body loosened over
Pistons beating backward past the clangoring cry
Halation spun to fog it out of
Swift approach and soon sliding away.

2.

Leaving my book, possessing
Self of its fluency
I word the night:
"Night like a glass,
Sheeted, smooth,
Night out of myself
Mirrored before me."

Barbara Gibbs

LETTER

You said to me something I shall remember,
Something which held no subterfuge, and hence
A rarity when coming from a woman.
You said to me:
"I don't believe you love me
But are lured by some illusion or mirage
Minted within your mind and counterfeit
Among the mintings of my own. We see
More often what we want to see, or what
Conveniently fits circumstance, and not
What stands before us, undeniable.
I may be wrong. Perhaps a pot of gold
Goes with the rainbow you would call my life,
And it is that your mind prefers to see.
And yet, whatever it is is really something
I don't possess. The Lord himself, I guess,
Alone knows what it is. More men than you
Have thought the same as you, have tried to fashion
Out of illusion a reality
Sufficient for foundation of their love,
And they have failed.
I never told them all I tell to you. . . .
And of this truth you may make what you will.
Perhaps I warn you more in selfishness,
In subtle fear that later disillusion
Might clutch us both, or separately. . . .
And I dread that.
I said I don't believe. . . .
I don't . . . and yet I am not sure just how. . . ."

SMOKE

This I remember. This you said to me.
And were you right or wrong? What can I say
Who have no proof or power to test your words?
I only know that you were brave beyond
The timid ones who dabble tongues in truth.
I only know I heard and heeded then
What I would not heed now, and turned away
When all my being pointed to one path
Which was a rainbow arching after storm,
A benediction blessed after stress.
Whether a pot of gold, minted or fool's,
Lay at the dim end of the path, and still
Lies there, or was illusion, does not need
To matter . . . if I saw it. All that matters
Is that I saw it then, and see it now,
And in the faith that it is there can rest
Content.
And you, the rainbow, even you
Might slowly coin a bright reward for faith.
Did you not know how myriad is gold?

W. H. Gerry

FIFTH ANNIVERSAY

Now I can not even remember you,
here at your hearth, drowsing in your chair,
dreaming you out of silence (old rains renew
old riddles: wet boughs in the wind). Out there,
lonely out there, you too—and is your door
so subtly locked? Are your own windows barred?
Is it so cold in your new house? Is your
bed, like mine, so loveless now, so hard?

The worlds revolve. Sir, in that aftercold
wandering, drawn by dark wind and star-motion:
could any love of mine touch you, then old
dreams were more than dream or dreaming-passion
to me, frail five-years-dead! who stare away
(poor Ghost!) the long night and the longer day.

Dudley Fitts

ENIGMA

"Am I the Word made flesh, or a syllable
Of the endless challenge to oblivion?"
The first man asks what only the last can tell,
But the puzzle's worth the probing, and though none
Has riddled his own identity, at least
His striving lifts him nearer God than beast.

To most, the night is dark—to a few there comes
An understanding instant when the mind
Beholds the Light. No clarion or roll of drums
Heralds the paraclete, but someone behind
Them lifts the kerchief and they see. The rapture
Stuns the brain beyond the hope of capture.

Yet, if the canvas of the memory is blurred
By sunlight, and the soul is vexed and aching
By a nameless taunt, familiar tongues are heard
Along the arbors of the dawn, and waking
They stare into the mirror with chagrin
Knowing the tenants of their dreams were kin.

Sometimes, the scent is keen. They search with eager
Nostrils to the wind, but the chilling spoor
Finds them bewildered at the dusk. How meager
The sum of all the searching? No one is sure,
Who is the hound and who the quarry, and they lack
The courage to turn swiftly and look back.

A. M. Sullivan

HELOISE TO ABELARD

As in a mirror a white taper's flame
Trembles and blazes through the moveless air,
Who looks upon my eyes will see you there,
Will glance upon your glory, guess your name.
This, the heart's brilliance, is no longer hid,
But burning back from that intenser light
Makes festival within the quiet night,
Even the festival you would forbid.
Yet know that neither you nor I may now
Recall the reckless glory we have sown
Upon the darkness of a lonely place.
Behold I lean where trees are white with snow,
Wearied of other beauty than your own,
Suddenly blind with your remembered face.

Anita Young

"THE DAMNED DON'T CRY"

There is no thing anywhere to weep over—nothing.
I have been willing to weep, have even searched its great stimulus
All places and have come back with eyes still dry
And been afraid (as of something shallow) at the wails up every street;
There is even mourning in my own house permanently,
And I go from cracked door to door hearing the increase and decrease
Of their moaning, and I watch them pass among themselves
Across the halls from room to room, with wet mute faces.
They have banded against me. One morning I found a note
Under my breakfast plate—"Leave this house!
"We can not allow your smiles longer. Nor your sympathy
"Until you have learned to weep over even smallnesses."
They most certainly are against me in my own house.
At night they group themselves in two rooms next to me
And around my hall door, when I would sleep,
Moaning over me, entreating, commanding I too learn
The ceremonies of their perpetual mourning.
I have tried to weep, even over their weeping, but
There is no thing anywhere to weep over—nothing.

R. Wade Vliet

WHEN IT IS NOON

It was a breathless season, you the one
Who knew my prime, my utmost cease
Compelled the shadows from my head. My feet
Walked where the wolves had gathered these
My stirless sheep for bloody detriment,
But you, you struck the horn, and all
Is still and wonderment.

There is no place for grieving, nor remorse
At early falls; my eyes at stars,
My mouth upon the winds, I am no more
Afraid of eagles and of scars.
I heard that day, I rose from tenderness
And walked in hoary times unmoved
Along each wilderness.

Oh, come at evening, test the way I must
By skulls and hungers go, and let
No single star go from its course. In youth
I leapt before, and noon is yet
With wideness, but the slow contumely
Of time flags as a mist along
To bend me heavily.

David Cornel DeJong.

THE AGNOSTIC BEFORE STAINED GLASS

To Charles J. Connick

The horns of angels that have made
A clamor and a quietness,
Down ways whereof we were afraid
Or sought security and shade,
Are muted, powerless;

But arched triumphantly and sure
This burning dusk is loud with them,
Like song, unsyllabled yet pure,
Our ears no longer can endure,
Our eyes receive its diadem.

Remindful of what passes now,
This glory graven on the night
Shines still as though it would avow
That majesty upon man's brow,
That signature of light.

O peace and ecstasy we knew
A legend and a child's desire,
Constrained to be bereft of you,
Us you desert not, but imbue
Our darkness with this fire.

Apart from all the ways we went,
We keep no less this radiant sword
A dream above the firmament;
And where the Temple veil hangs rent,
This jewel of the Lord.

Winfield Scott

Subscriptions to *Smoke* are at the rate of four issues for one dollar.
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